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## CHAPTER 15B – LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

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### 15B.1 RESOURCE OVERVIEW

#### 15B.1.1 Background and History

In the years since the BLM's original WSA inventory was completed, Utah wilderness has become a national issue. For over 20 years the public has debated which lands have wilderness characteristics. Because of the debate, and the significant passage of time since the BLM's original inventory, in 1996 the Secretary of the Interior directed the BLM to take another look at the areas in question.

The Secretary specifically directed the BLM to review certain lands in Utah that had been proposed for wilderness designation in legislation then before Congress (H.R. 1500) to determine if they had wilderness characteristics. The Secretary wished to know whether, in the 20 years since the BLM completed its first inventory, conditions had changed on the ground, and whether there were other, not-yet-identified lands that possessed wilderness characteristics. Following resolution of an injunction in a lawsuit filed in 1996 that challenged the BLM's authority to conduct the inventory, the BLM completed the inventory in 1998. In 1999 the BLM released the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory*, listing another 2.6 million acres of public land in Utah with wilderness characteristics. Based on subsequent public comments and after conducting additional field checks, the BLM revised the inventory in 2003 for the Moab Field Office.

The revised inventory lists 23 areas (190,432 acres) under Moab Field Office jurisdiction possessing wilderness characteristics. These lands are managed according to the existing Grand Resource Management Plan (RMP). In the years since completion of the inventory, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) has submitted information to the Moab BLM suggesting that other areas also have wilderness characteristics.

Over the past several years, legislation has been introduced into both houses of Congress to designate wilderness on public lands in Utah. In the 109th Congress, this bill is known as America's Red Rock Wilderness Act (HR 1796, S 639). This bill, if passed, would designate as wilderness approximately 830,000 acres of public land within the boundaries of the Moab Field Office area. This legislation includes existing Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) (areas found to have wilderness characteristics by the BLM in its 1996–1999 inventory) and additional lands proposed by the Utah Wilderness Coalition (including SUWA) in HR 1796 and S 639.

In April 2003 the U.S. District Court (Utah, Central District) approved an agreement negotiated to settle the 1996 lawsuit brought by the State of Utah, the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), and the Utah Association of Counties. The suit had challenged the BLM's authority to conduct new wilderness inventories. As a result of the settlement, the BLM has no authority to designate new WSAs but does have the authority to conduct inventories for values associated with wilderness characteristics and consider these values in its land use planning process.

### **15B.1.2 Purpose of the Planning Process**

The BLM must determine which areas possess wilderness characteristics in order to consider planning for this resource. The areas addressed in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory* that are administered by the Moab Field Office are summarized in Table 15B-1 and depicted in Figure 15B-1. The BLM's determinations on the areas proposed for management for wilderness characteristics by external proponents are summarized in Table 15B-2 and depicted in Figure 15B-1. The agency will consider whether or not these lands with existing wilderness characteristics will be managed to preserve some or all of their values with other land management tools (e.g., special recreation management area, off-highway vehicle [OHV] designation, limitations on oil and gas leasing, VRM management, transportation planning, management of recreation settings and activities, etc.).

## **15B.2 SPECIFIC MANDATES AND AUTHORITY**

### **15B.2.1 Legal Authorities**

The mandates for consideration of values associated with wilderness characteristics in land use planning are:

- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)
- Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1500–1508.
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, 43 USC 1701, et seq., Sections 201 and 202

### **15B.2.2 BLM Guidance**

- Washington Office Instruction Memorandum No. 2003-275 Change 1, Consideration of Wilderness Characteristics in Land Use Plans (Excluding Alaska)
- Manual Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook

### **15B.2.3 Process**

The BLM's policy and guidance on consideration of the values associated with wilderness characteristics of public lands and management of public lands for these characteristics is spelled out in Instruction Memorandum No. 2003-275-Change 1. Evaluation considers an area's wilderness characteristics, the BLM's ability to manage the area for wilderness characteristics, and other resource values and uses found on BLM lands and in areas proposed by the public. In carrying out the evaluation, the criteria of naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation will be used. An independent unit must be of at least 5,000 acres in size. Areas contiguous to WSA's, WIA's that possess wilderness characteristics, or areas that are administratively endorsed (AE) for wilderness by another land-management agency may be less than 5,000 acres.

**Management Considerations** – A decision to protect or preserve certain lands in their natural condition, if appropriate, or provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, may be made at the conclusion of the RMP process. The following should be considered to appropriately evaluate the area:

- management considerations outlined in IM 2003-275-Change 1, including establishing goals and objectives that describe the future desired condition of the land and resources, desired outcome of the recreation experience, and allowable uses
- land status
- access to state or private inholdings
- valid existing rights

**Other Resource Values and Uses** - Consider both the extent to which other resource values and uses of the area would be foregone or adversely affected, and the benefits that would accrue to other resource values and uses as a result of placing priority on values associated with wilderness characteristics for a particular area.

### 15B.3 CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

#### 15B.3.3 Lands with Wilderness Characteristics from the 1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory

In the 1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003) the BLM identified 22 areas (WIAs) lying completely or partly within the planning area that possess wilderness characteristics. The wilderness characteristics of these areas will be analyzed in the Moab RMP to determine how they should be managed. Table 15B-1 summarizes the acreages and current uses of each of these areas; Figure 15B-1 indicates their locations in the Moab Field Office, and shows those lands that possessed and those that lacked wilderness characteristics.

**Table 15B-1: Lands Inventoried in the 1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003), Total Acreage, and Acreage with and without Wilderness Characteristics**

<i>Name (areas marked with an asterisk [*] are contiguous with a WSA of the same name)</i>	<b>Total acreage</b>	<b>Acreage with Wilderness Characteristics (WC)</b>	<b>Acreage without Wilderness Characteristics (NWC)</b>
Beaver Creek	33,357	25,722	7,635
*Behind the Rocks	7,961	3,381	4,580
*Coal Canyon	15,229	13,850	1,379
*Desolation Canyon	10,690	10,498	192
Fisher Towers	17,095	16,668	427
*Floy Canyon	12,228	9,983	2,245
*Flume Canyon	5,344	3,563	1,781
Goldbar	12,876	6,106	6,770
Gooseneck	5,540	1,040 <sup>3</sup>	4,500

<i>Name (areas marked with an asterisk [*] are contiguous with a WSA of the same name)</i>	<b>Total acreage</b>	<b>Acreage with Wilderness Characteristics (WC)</b>	<b>Acreage without Wilderness Characteristics (NWC)</b>
Granite Creek	5,328	4,528	800
Harts Point (MFO) <sup>1</sup>		1,568	
Hatch Wash	24,096	10,979	13,117
Hunter Canyon	4,492	4,462	30
Labyrinth Canyon	68,717	24,300	38,969
*Lost Spring Canyon	12,661	11,456	1,205
Mary Jane Canyon	25,158	24,748	410
*Mill Creek Canyon	6,684	3,394	3,290
*Negro Bill Canyon	13,724	2,324	11,400
Shafer Canyon	3,045	1,845	1,200
*Spruce Canyon	2,213	1,131	1,082
*Westwater Canyon	2,073	1,193	770
Westwater Creek	9,100	8,701	399
<b>Total</b>		<b>190,432</b>	

### 15B.3.4 Lands with Wilderness Characteristics from External Proponents

In addition to the lands described above, additional lands in the Moab Field Office have been proposed for wilderness as part of HR 1796 and S 639, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. Five areas within the bill were evaluated for wilderness characteristics prior to this planning effort. Additional areas have been evaluated as part of the current planning effort. Table 15B-2 identifies areas proposed by external proponents. The table also summarizes the determinations made by the BLM regarding the areas' wilderness characteristics. Figure 15B-1 maps lands with wilderness characteristics (WC) and lands not having wilderness characteristics (NWC). The process used by the BLM to determine the acreage with wilderness characteristics consisted of several steps. BLM used a combination of field visits, data layers including roads, vegetative treatments, (especially chaining), range improvements, and rights-of-way, aerial photography interpretation, and interdisciplinary review to reach a conclusion on those acreages that have wilderness characteristics.

<sup>1</sup> The majority of the Harts Point unit is in the Monticello Field Office. Acreage with wilderness characteristics is within the Moab Field Office only.

**Table 15B-2: BLM-identified Lands with and without Wilderness Characteristics from External Proponents**

Name	Total Acres <sup>2</sup>	Acres with Wilderness Characteristics (WC)	Acres without Wilderness Characteristics (NWC)	Comments
Arches Adjacent	11,410	6,396	5,014	Adjacent to Arches N.P./AE
Beaver Creek	9294	0	9294	Adjacent to Beaver Creek WIA/WC
Behind the Rocks	286	262	24	Adjacent to Behind the Rocks WIA/WC or WSA
Big Triangle	20,542	5,200	15,342	
Coyote Wash	28,069	0	28,069	
Dead Horse Cliffs	2,346	796	1,550	Adjacent to WIA/WC or Canyonlands N.P/AE
Diamond Canyon	15,467	7,759	7,708	Adjacent to WIA/WC or WSA
Dome Plateau	25,818	14,206	11,612	
Duma Point	14,698	0	14,368	
Fisher Towers	1,740	556	1,184	Adjacent to WIA/WC
Goldbar Canyon	435	329	106	Adjacent to WIA/WC
Gooseneck	53	38	15	Adjacent to WIA/WC
Hatch/Harts/Lockhart	46,729	2,679	44,050	Adjacent to WC in Monticello FO
Hells Hole	2,540	2,538	2	Adjacent to WC in Vernal FO
Hideout Canyon	12,269	11,607	662	
Horsethief Point	14,172	8,358	5,814	Adjacent to WIA/WC or Canyonlands NP/AE
Labyrinth Canyon	21,189	550	20,639	
Mary Jane Canyon	86	31	55	Adjacent to WIA/WC

<sup>2</sup> Public lands managed by Moab Field Office. Excludes acreage encompassed by State lands, Wilderness Study Areas, and lands inventoried by BLM in 1999 (both with and without wilderness characteristics).

Mexico Point	12,837	12,837	0	
Mill Creek Canyon	1,028	0	1,028	
Morning Glory	96	6	87	Adjacent to WIA/WC or WSA
Porcupine Rim	67	3	64	Adjacent to WIA/WC or WSA
Renegade Point	6,635	0	6,635	
Survey Point	10	0	10	Majority of unit in Vernal FO
Westwater Canyon	4,509	762	3,747	
Yellow Bird	2,212	358	1,854	Adjacent to WIA/WC or Arches NP/AE
<b>Totals</b>	<b>254,017</b>	<b>75,279</b>	<b>178,738</b>	

## 15B.4 EXISTING MANAGEMENT DIRECTION IN THE GRAND RESOURCE AREA RMP (1985)

### 15B.4.1 Existing Planning Decisions

The RMP process addresses in general terms management directions affecting those lands that the BLM has found to possess wilderness characteristics. Decisions made in the existing RMP affecting lands with wilderness characteristics include:

- OHV designations (open to cross-country travel, limited to existing or designated roads and/or trails, closed)
- Oil and gas leasing categories and associated stipulations
- Grazing and wildlife allocations
- Minerals development
- Utility corridors and rights-of-way
- Woodland harvest
- Recreation restrictions

The management actions listed above often affect only a portion of the areas with wilderness characteristics. Other lands in the Moab FO area are managed for values other than maintaining or enhancing wilderness characteristics. Some of these planned management actions may not be compatible with preservation of values associated with wilderness characteristics.

### 15B.4.2 Existing Management

Lands With Wilderness Characteristics– These lands are managed according to existing land use plans. In evaluating proposed actions affecting these lands, the BLM must determine if the effects of the proposed action on wilderness characteristics are addressed adequately in the existing NEPA record. If the existing NEPA record is inadequate, the BLM can assess the impacts on wilderness characteristics of proposed actions. The BLM will then balance the value of wilderness characteristics with competing values. The BLM then has the option to manage to

mitigate (or eliminate) the effects of the proposed action on wilderness characteristics, depending on the BLM's assessment of the resource value of wilderness characteristics relative to other resource values.

## **15.5B ISSUES OR CONCERNS**

- Management of lands with wilderness characteristics

## **15B.6 MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS**

Opportunities could be available within the RMP to manage for preserving the natural landscape, as well as for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, in certain areas:

1. OHV designations - Certain areas could be closed to OHV use to preserve their wilderness characteristics. Fire management - Portions of these areas could be placed in a limited or zero wildfire suppression zone, to minimize impacts to naturalness from activities such as the construction of fire roads and vegetative clearing, and to restore native vegetation communities.
2. Wildlife - Management techniques could be used to enhance wildlife habitat. Tools available include limits on motorized or mechanized travel, oil and gas development stipulations to protect wildlife, and protection of watershed and riparian areas that are crucial to wildlife.
3. Recreation - Certain areas could be managed to preserve and enhance opportunities for solitude and/or primitive and unconfined recreation present in these areas. Limitations on use could include:
  - Closing areas to motorized and mechanized travel, to enhance primitive recreation opportunities (setting, experience, and activities)
  - Limiting all such travel to designated routes
  - Limiting commercial uses such as filming and competitive events
  - Designating areas as Special Recreation Management Areas to place management emphasis on primitive recreation settings, experiences, and uses
4. Oil and gas leasing - The impacts of oil and gas leasing (and the actions that may follow) on the wilderness characteristics of these lands could be minimized by the following actions:
  - Continuing to keep all or parts of these areas closed to leasing
  - For areas with the highest sensitivity (but still open for leasing), considering requiring no surface occupancy
  - Restricting the use of seismic exploration
5. Woodcutting - Placing restrictions on woodcutting could help preserve the naturalness of the area by reducing road proliferation, as well as the inevitable scars to vegetation.
6. Visual resource (scenery) management – Designation of areas as Class I or Class II could help to preserve the natural landscape.
7. Right-of-way corridors – Prohibiting rights-of-way across or avoiding lands with wilderness characteristics could help to protect those characteristics.

8. Land tenure adjustments – Acquiring inholdings through exchange, willing sellers, etc., could improve management of natural values or primitive recreation activities.
9. Mineral material sales – Prohibiting sales of sand and gravel, etc., could help protect the natural characteristics of an area.

## 15.7 REFERENCES

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1985. *Grand Resource Area Resource Management Plan*. Salt Lake City, Utah.
- BLM. 1995. Manual Handbook H-8550-1, *Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review*. Washington D.C.
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